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# CIA on Trial

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**T**HE BAY OF PIGS, by Haynes Johnson. Illustrated with photographs. W. W. Norton. \$5.95.

Information on the Cuban invasion comes hard. *The Bay of Pigs* by Haynes Johnson is no exception. Based on extensive interviews with the brigade leaders, his book, according to the jacket blurb, purports to tell "the full story at last" about the Bay of Pigs. But promise exceeds performance.

As the brigade leaders announce in a signed preface, "this book [relates] the facts as we know them. No member of our Brigade could know everything that happened." Fair enough. Were Mr. Johnson's efforts represented simply as an account of men under fire, of their training and capture, of their subsequent imprisonment and indemnification, this book could be recommended without reservation. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The trouble with this otherwise sound book is simply that Mr. Johnson has failed to place the invasion in its total perspective.

In the first place, a complete history of the Bay of Pigs would have to focus on Washington. The Kennedy administration launched the invasion and was responsible for it. What Mr. Johnson has given us is an account of decisions in Washington as seen and interpreted (with considerable retrospect) by Cubans two thousand miles away. The author's treatment of events in Washington is sketchy. He tells us, for example, that he "has gained information and other documentary material from sources which cannot be divulged, but which are irrefutable." What does this mean? Did he see the Taylor report on the affair? Or perhaps he talked to a member of the investigation (General Taylor, Admiral Burke, Allen Dulles, or Robert Kennedy), although each supposedly is pledged to secrecy.

MUCH of the information Mr. Johnson reports is critical of the Joint Chiefs and the CIA. One wonders whether he spoke to anyone in those offices, or if he attempted to do so. He has said that he sent galley proofs to the CIA and invited comment but received none. This is significant, but it does not relieve Mr. Johnson of the obligation of exploring all sides of the controversy—an obligation best discharged while a manuscript is being prepared, not after it is completed. Former CIA Deputy Director Richard Bissell, for example, certainly should have been interviewed, yet he was not, nor was he ever approached by Johnson. My point is this: Haynes Johnson makes numerous charges against the Central Intelligence Agency and the Joint Chiefs of Staff based on testimony of the Cuban survivors, but these charges simply do not stand up.

Take the case against the CIA. First, we are told that the agency misled the Cubans into believing the success of the operation would be guaranteed by the American government; that the Cubans believed the brigade "would have the complete support of the United States government, including United States military—and air—support."

This charge has been made repeatedly and deserves further analysis. What the Cubans believed (or wanted to believe) and what they were told are not necessarily the same. Consider President Kennedy's press conference of April 12 in which he unequivocally excluded participation by U.S. forces in the invasion, the special emissary he sent to the training camps to ensure that no U.S. personnel participated, and the similar measures taken by the Joint Chiefs and the CIA. The impression is unmistakable that if the Cubans believed in armed U.S. support during the invasion phase of the operation, the mistake was of their own making.

This leads to the second and much more serious charge by Mr. Johnson: that the CIA operated as an *imperium in imperio*; that it planned to unleash the brigade regardless of Presidential decision, and that procedures

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to short-circuit a possible order to stand down were elaborately provided for. This charge is harder to dispute, because the CIA has given such an impression on many occasions. It may be, as Mr. Johnson suggests, that in speaking of the CIA one should distinguish between the agency itself and its derring-do men in the field. Though co-ordination of intelligence activities necessarily must be at the highest level possible to minimize leakage, the unfortunate result is that whenever anyone is taken by surprise by a sudden turn of events, he tends to assume that the CIA (or at least its agents in the field) acted independently. In the case of the Bay of Pigs nothing could be further from the truth. Rather than being purely a CIA operation, its planning took place at the highest level possible.

President Kennedy met eight times with the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and the CIA on the invasion, and in these meetings the operation plan was developed down to the last detail. Far from exercising a benign supervisory role, Kennedy actively engaged in the detailed technical planning for the invasion. To suggest that the final plan simply was "presented" to him by the CIA and Joint Chiefs is wide of the mark. Nowhere is Mr. Johnson's curiously dimensionless view more evident than when he discusses (or to be more precise, when he fails to discuss) pre-invasion planning in Washington. He carefully weaves a blanket accusation against the professional departments, and just as carefully excludes those politically responsible. In particular,